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RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 2863

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SUBJECT: MAOISTS ATTACK ORISSA MINE ON EVE OF INDIAN NATIONAL  
ELECTIONS

11. (SBU) On April 12, several days before polling began in the eastern India state of Orissa for both the parliamentary and state assembly elections, approximately 200 left-wing extremists, known as Maoists or Naxalites, mounted an armed attack on the public sector enterprise National Aluminum Company (NALCO) bauxite mine in Damanjodi. Damanjodi is located approximately 600 km southwest of the Orissa's state capital Bhubaneswar in Koraput district, a district with a history of Maoist activity. According to a NALCO official, 11 soldiers from the Central Industrial Security Force, the government paramilitary force responsible for protecting public sector industrial enterprises, along with five Maoists were killed in the encounter. The same source informed PolFSN that while approximately 200 employees were trapped in the mining facility during the incident, which began at 9:30 pm and lasted until early morning the next day, there were no civilian casualties or hostages. According to media reports, NALCO employees have refused to return to work until significant improvements are made for their security.

12. (SBU) The Orissa Inspector General of Police (Operations) Sudhanshu Sarangi told PolFSN that Maoists had targeted NALCO's explosive depot consisting of 12 tons of gelatin sticks and ammonium nitrate. Five kilometers from the Damanjodi mining facilities, an unknown number of Maoists also simultaneously hijacked a truck laden with nine tons of explosives. Sarangi confirmed that security forces recovered the truck and all onboard explosives. According to media reports, Maoists may have laid land mines on the roads approaching Damanjodi in an attempt to thwart security forces moving into the area. State security forces are currently working to sweep the area and clear any planted mines. According to media reports, this attack has prompted a central government review of security at public and private firms in parts of India with Maoist activities.

Comment

13. (SBU) The repelled Maoist attack on the NALCO mine is the most brazen attack in Orissa since the Maoists successfully looted a state police armory in February 2008. The attack, along with a number of Maoist Election Day attacks on state security forces in Bihar, Chattisgarh and Jharkhand, may signify Maoist intent to persuade villagers in affected areas to heed the Maoist's call for a boycott of the parliamentary elections, which will continue in four more phases until May 13. The Maoists may also be trying to improve their ability to extort funds from public and private mining or industrial interests, which have been known to pay Maoists for their security. The attack highlights the additional security-related costs of doing business in remote, forested areas in Eastern India.

PAYNE